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## Catch a Fire - DVD

Political masterpiece or not worth the bother?

by Dan Hall published on 31 July 2007

Catch a Fire is the true story of political activist Patrick Chamusso who was sentenced to 24 years in prison after attempting to blow up a South African oil refinery in 1980.

Derek "Antwone Fisher" Luke plays Chamusso, a loving husband and father of two renowned for his apolitical views and subservient nature.

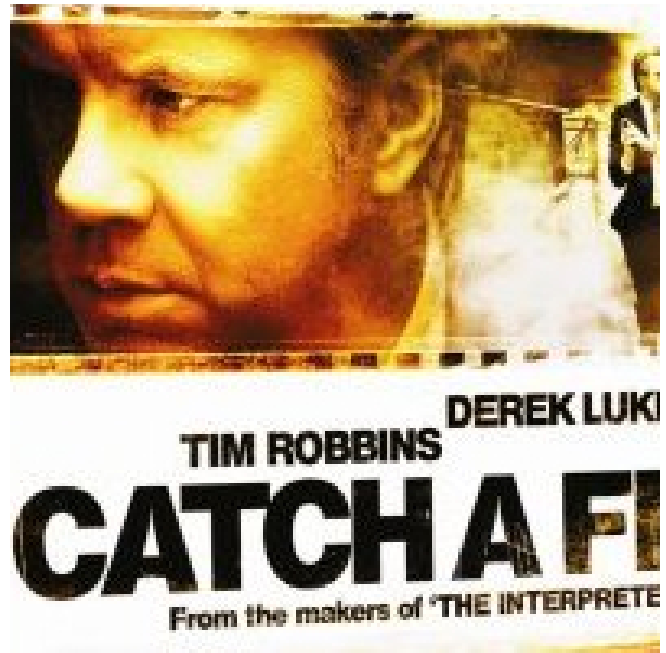
So when the Secunda oil plant where he works is attacked by political terrorists, he is more than a little shocked to be pulled in for questioning. Starved, abused and beaten to within an inch of his life, Derek is finally released when his torturer Nic Vos (Robbins) - colonel in the country's Police Security Branch - realises he's got the wrong man.

But Derek is changed forever by his experience and decides to take a stand against his oppressors, becoming an operative in the ANC and plotting to return to Secunda to destroy the remainder of the refinery.

Teaming a director, Phillip Noyce, famed for his intelligent political thrillers (The Quiet American, Rabbit Proof Fence) with a writer, Shawn Slovo, whose father was the one-time leader of the ANC combat wing, should have been a case of lighting the blue touch paper and standing well back.

Despite their efforts to paint Chamusso and Vos as similar characters, both fighting to protect what they believe in, there is little doubt where our sympathies should lie thanks to Robbins' pantomime villain performance.

And for such a complicated issue there are no grey areas, with Chamusso clearly painted as a freedom fighter rather than a terrorist, and Vos the scary-eyed nutcase who embodies everything terrible about apartheid era South Africa.



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While the predictable story moves along at a decent pace for the first hour, the last third, which should be the most exciting section of the story as Patrick's mission reaches its explosive climax, fizzles out with a whimper rather than the bang we had hoped for.

And although Luke takes another step towards the Hollywood A-list, *Catch a Fire* will no doubt be looked back on as a missed opportunity for everyone involved.

In the extras, director Philip Noyce, producer Roby Slovo, screenwriter Shawn Slovo, actors Robbins, Luke and Henna all contribute to an unusual audio commentary that provides plenty of background information about the story but virtually no technical details about the film or shoot.

Noyce and Robbins give insights into the apartheid regime that were strangely lacking in the final product, while Luke explains the challenges he faced in portraying such a legendary character.

Also included are a few deleted scenes, which combine to less than three minutes of footage, that serve no other purpose than to fill space on this under-populated special features package.

## VERDICT

What we have ended up with is a worthy but dull spectacle, that neither tells us anything new about the apartheid regime nor properly ignites as a genuine thriller.

Rating: 15

Staring: Derek Luke, Tim Robbins, Bonnie Henna, Mncedisi Shabangu, Tumisho Masha  
Directed by: Philip Noyce,

Extras: Audio Commentary, Deleted Scenes

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## At a glance

### What is it?

Drama

### Good

Director Phillip Noyce has a proven record in intelligent political thrillers, Luke takes another step towards the Hollywood A-list, Chamusso's life story was made for the cinema

### Bad

We learn nothing new about the brutal apartheid regime, Robbins' pantomime villain performance, the ending fizzles out with a whimper rather than the expected bang

### Verdict

What we have ended up with is a worthy but dull spectacle

**Price** £20

**Our score**

**6/10**

**Your score**

**?/10**